

Chapter 31
Third World Advocate Decries Colonized Peoples' Loss of Identity
(1952)
Frantz Fanon

Introduction

In this excerpt from his *Black Skin, White Mask* (1952), the Third World writer and anti-imperialist Frantz Fanon (1925-1961) addresses one of the most pernicious consequences of European imperialism: the effacement of ethnic identity. Fanon was born on Martinique, a French possession, and, after completing his education in Paris, became a well-known psychoanalyst. As a Francophone, Fanon recognized in himself the cultural imperialism he and his fellow colonized people had suffered. In his writings, Fanon called for colonial peoples to reject the capitalistic, imperialistic, racist West; to do so, however, they had to learn who they really were. Fanon's literary career corresponded with the post-war emergence of national liberation movements all over Asia, Africa, and elsewhere. While the colonial powers generally acceded to demands for independence, sooner or later, they retained old structures, or created new ones, to maintain a great deal of influence in the former colonies. It was just such neo-colonialism that Third World leaders and intellectuals such as Fanon feared.

Questions to Consider

- According to Fanon, how does the young African perceive of himself or herself?
- How could colonial peoples reclaim their cultural identity?

Source

I propose nothing short of the liberation of the man of color from himself...

The black schoolboy in the Antilles, who in his lessons is forever talking about "our ancestors, the [French]," identifies himself with the explorer, the bringer of civilization, the white man who carries truth to savages--an all-white truth. There is identification--that is, the young Negro subjectively adopts a white man's attitude....

Little by little, one can observe in the young Antillean the formation and crystallization of an attitude and a way of thinking and seeing that are essentially white. When in school he has to read stories of savages told by white men, he always thinks of the [African].... The Negro lives in Africa. Subjectively, intellectually, the Antillean conducts himself like a white man. But he is a Negro. That he will learn once he goes to Europe; and when he hears Negroes mentioned he will recognize that the word includes himself.

Source: Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove, 1967), 8, 147-148.